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A New Letter from Giuseppe Baretti To Thomas Hollis

Alan T. McKenzie

This Mr. Hollis, it may be proper to say, was a bigotted Whig, or Republican; one who mis-spent an ample fortune in paving the way for sedition and revolt in this and the neighboring kingdoms, by dispersing democratical works, and sometimes highly ornamented with daggers, caps of liberty, &c.¹

ONE of the most frequent beneficiaries of these democratical dispersals was Harvard College, which has expressed her gratitude by acquiring Hollis' Diary, mentioned below. Another was Giuseppe Baretti, man about the towns of Venice, Milan, and London, and close friend of Samuel Johnson. Baretti showed his gratitude in a lengthy and rather fulsome acknowledgement of a packet of books and pamphlets which Hollis had sent to him at Venice. A copy of this letter, written in June 1763, and previously unknown, has come to light with the discovery of Baretti's Commonplace Book in the Furness Collection at the University of Pennsylvania. The text of the letter follows, in what appears to be the first draft, with all of Baretti's fussing with syntax and diction. It is of some interest in itself, as it contains details about Baretti's own life as well as a number of his sharp comments on British politics and trade. It also offers occasion for a brief review of the relationship between these two curious figures from the past.²

¹ "Letters of Rev. B. N. Turner," in *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. John Nichols, VI (London, 1831), 157. Some of Boswell's phrasing seems to have been fresh in Turner's mind. See James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, ed. George Birkbeck Hill, rev. L. F. Powell (Oxford, 1934-50), IV, 97 [hereafter cited as *Life*], and *Boswell on the Grand Tour*, ed. Frederick A. Pottle (New York, 1953), p. 213.

² See Caroline Robbins, "Library of Liberty — Assembled for Harvard College by Thomas Hollis of Lincoln's Inn," *HLB*, V (1951), 5-23, 181-196. For a detailed account of his donations to another repository, see Hans Utz, *Die Hollis-Sammlung in Bern*, Schriften der Literarischen Gesellschaft: Neue Folge der Neujaarsblätter VIII (Bern, 1959). For an account of the discovery of the Baretti diary see the

In this transcription, all words and phrases deleted by Baretti have been enclosed in pointed brackets; x's have been used to indicate deleted letters that are illegible. Interlinear insertions are placed between slashes, with double slashes for insertions above insertions. (The slashes enclosing "London" in the heading are Baretti's, as are single square brackets in the text.)

To Thomas Hollis Esq^r/London/

Venice June 22^d 1763.

Dear Sir. Your generous supply of English food to a distant and starving man is so welcome, that the tongue of gratitude could not tell how much. I have /hastily/ run over your /Books/ Pamphlets with the more eagerness, as I had been for these eighteen or twenty months without almost hearing the Name of England uttered, quite taken up with my private concerns, or, to say better, intirely plunged in sadness for the infamous behaviour of Count Firmian to me, who after having solemnly and repeatedly promised to place me in the Imperial Chancery of Milan, and kept me in that Town with his fair and bewitching words for above a year, (forced me at last by his) /(<made me at last resolve with>)/ /forced me at last by/ unaccountable delays and tormenting procrastination to give him up for a Man of nothing and depart. [I then came to Venice, and here vexation and discontent agitated me (<so>) with fresh violence, that I fell ill, and was confined to a bed for a pretty long while, more than once in danger of my life, as that Count's strange conduct was render'd still more grievous to me by some other (<additional>) no less grievous (<pain>) addition of pain from another cause /that it is needless to tell./ However Time, that great Healer of mental wounds, operated according to his Nature, and has at last restored my long-tossed Soul to her wonted calm; so that I have by this hour very near forgot my past sufferings and troubles, and (<If>)if I am not as chearful as I used to be, I am likewise far from being sorrowful and despondent as my undeserved miscarrying at Milan had made me.

Here having nothing to do to (<kill>) /help on/ time and keep life from stagnation, and drawing but little comfort from the Society of the(<se>) ignorant and vicious (<Inhabitants, I have again>) /Drones that surround me on all sides, I have/ plunged into Study (<The>) again. The friends (<whose>) /whom/ I left here fourteen years ago are partly dead, and partly have so changed their ways or their situation, (<and I find so little alleviement of>) to (<making>) / and (<they are>) //I find them// succeeded by such a generation, that (<finding very>)/ (<the

Johnsonian News Letter, XXVIII, No. 3 (September, 1968), 7-8 and my "Two Letters from Baretti to Johnson," *PMLA* (forthcoming—March, 1971). I am grateful to the curator of the Furness collection, Professor M. A. Shaaber, for permission to publish this material and to Professor William E. Miller, assistant curator, for much assistance.

making of new ones, that I) /I am intirely debarred the pleasure of conversation, and/ live /as/ perfectly /alone/ in the middle of this populous Town as a Lion in a desert. (Marsili himself whom) /(<Doctor Marsili himself>/ /Add to this, that Marsili himself whom/ I had used with more than /brotherly/ tenderness and cordiality (than he could have expected even from a Brother) when his father left him in London without a penny for two whole years, Marsili did so perfectly overlook me on my arrival here, that I have not seen his face these six months, nor care to see it any more. Books therefore have been my necessary refuge against solitariness, and they are become my only and my constant Company. Consider then, (my) dear Sir, how acceptable your present of new Books must have been that came to shake my imagination, and awake a new train of ideas in my ever-meditating brains. (Your) /Those/ Books and Pamphlets have transported me to dear England, and I see that (she) her Sons continue still to (form no less) /form a Nation no less/ brave than (a) boisterous. (Nation) I see that they are still enthusiastical Adorers of their native Land (and still Enemies) /as well as implacable Enemies to the French and/ to one another; still Squanderers individually of their private incomes, and still furiously seeking to encrease the publick wealth, (always racing after commerce) /by industry and commerce, (and) Faith I rejoice to/ (and all xxxx) /(<I> find them still proper/ Politicians from the Great Chancellour (down to the Cobbler,) /and the Admiralty Lords down to Haberdasher and the/ Cobbler. The Prophet Heathcote made me smile with his Screech-owl's Predictions of endless calamities, total ruin, infallible extirpation, and other such fine things to his fellow-subjects only because a Scotch Ministry was about giving many Hogsheads of Martinico-Sugar, and a deal of Goree-Gum to the (perfidious) French, the ever perfidious French; and I (xx) am perfectly satisfied that (xx) M^r Wilkes will have much a do, with all his bustle against some imperious Lords, to make /poor/ England forget, that she has now the misfortune of being the absolute Mistress of innumerable Acres of snow in North-America. [Then /the/ useful Lists of the ingenious M^r Mortimer I very much admire. I am /even/ tempted to call them Pindarical, as they (give) undoubtedly /give/ a vast idea of your Metropolis' immensity, and profess myself much obliged to them, as they have called back to my mind many names that were upon the point of leaving it. Yet I am /a little/ angry with that Gentleman for his disapproving of the Perfumers, and talking of them contemptuously, while he is so warm a Panegirist of the Painters, and shows himself partial to the Musicians. Why shall not (the) /our/ Noses be granted their pleasures as well as (the) /our/ Eyes and (the) /our/ Ears? (And the more may) The Perfumers may indeed think themselves most barbarously wrong'd, as they are chiefly careful to delight Ladies (fine) /pretty/ Noses with hungary water and Sanpareille, just as Painters aim at the gratification of Connoisseurs' eyes with (the representation) /exact copies/ of fine faces and snowy bosoms, and as Musicians endeavour to (delight) /charm/ both sexes with Trillo's and Messa-di-Voce's. It would not even be very difficult to prove that all Artists and Traders are all (Perfun) no better than Perfumers, as the /chief/ drift of each

Art and Trade is no more than to (find some) /procure/ things acceptable to one or other of the five Senses. (, which in more emphaticall terms is expressed) /commonly) //(emphatically)// (expressed with the phrase of enlarging the) //increasing the)// (number of the)/ (*Conveniences of Life.*)

The other List (for) of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce truly amazes me with the /prodigious/ Number of great and small Mecenas (that) you have amongst you. But I see by the (Premiums offered) /following Catalogue/ of Premiums by them offered to (xxxx) /skilful and/ the industrious, that a great many things are by them encourag'd, which, thank(s) God, I stand in no need of.

Mason's and Churchill's Poetry, and the Letters to the Cocoa-tree I have not yet perused, but expect no less satisfaction from them than from the Lists. The Cocoa-tree especially, I know before hand, will make me /(more)/ either a Whig or a Tory, as I shall be more affected by Pro or Con exposed in them, with English impartiality and candour to be sure. Since I left England, (I) not knowing what might be proper Abroad to be, I neglected both distinctions, and submitted to love and admire the English Nation collectively, without the least proclivity to Tory or Whig; but this dead neutrality of mine (b) will be ended to morrow or next day, as those Letters (xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx) /to that Tree/ inform me of the present state of things in that Country to which neither Native nor Foreigner can claim the least relation (of) unless he declares for a Party, and shows himself very (violent) /furious/ in contributing to the general good of the People rather this way than that way.

Rejoice then, good Sir, in your liberality to me, as you see, that if long absence from (England) /your Island/ has turned me (again) into my original state of Italian coldness with regard to the various aims and interests and passions of your Nation, your seasonable Present (has made me a) /will directly (make)/ (me) /warm me into/ an Englishman again. (Yes, Sir, I shall directly) /Within two days at most I shall positively/ breathe Liberty with the Whig or Slavery with the Tory, roused from my Lethargick Philosophy by the Letters to the Cocoa Tree. In less than a Week then, I shall be able to look about for travelling Britons, and declare for Pit or for Bute, for Wilkes or for Egremont, until the French Gazettes afford us better subjects to expatiate upon, informing us of some new Man in the Bottle (?) come to blast all remembrance of Bute and Pit, of Egremont and Wilkes. Yes, Sir, some new Man in the Bottle will soon sink (into oblivion all) those chidomadary Heroes into oblivion, as (the Opera Theatre) /the strife about the/ Opera-(Theatre) /House/ between /singing/ Mingotti and /pimping/ Vanneschi formerly did those great and glorious Patriots who suffered Minorca to (be taken) /be carried away/ by a parcel of (French) Ragamuffins that wore wooden Shoes and fed upon frogs.

You see, dear Mr Hollis, how your /kind/ Present has made me recover some (good humour) /of my usual/ alacrity; but my paper decreases; therefore I put an end to this mad nonsense, seriously thanking you for the continuation of your precious friendship to me; and begging my best compliments

to Mr Johnson, Mr Fitzherbert, Mr Brand, and Mr Porten, Mr Reynholds, Mr Cipriani, and Mr Wilton as they come in your way. I repeat myself full of everlasting respect and gratitude.

Dear Sir, Your most humble and most obliged Friend and Servant
Joseph Baretti.

This letter invites a brief review of the relationship between Baretti and Hollis. Hollis' Diary, now at Harvard, first mentions Baretti under 18 November 1759: "At home the whole day, variously employed. Signor Baretti with me in the evening."³ The next such entry, 15 February 1760, suggests that this was a recent acquaintance: "Mr. Baretti with me on a long visit in the morning. Much entertainment from him. Certainly an ingenious and I think verily an honest man. — Within all day. Wrote after." The two may have met on one of Hollis' trips abroad, or, more likely, sometime after Baretti's arrival in London in March 1751. Hollis records several other meetings with Baretti in 1760; one or two of them appear to have been in conjunction with Samuel Johnson. When Baretti was preparing to return to Italy in August, Hollis sent him "a dozen copies of the Publication of the Committee for cloathing French prisoners of war, which he has promised to disperse, obligingly, in Spain & Portugal." Samuel Johnson received five pounds from Thomas Hollis for writing the Preface to that work. (*Life*, IV, 491).

According to Hollis' *Memoirs* (a fatuous work whose preparation prevented its author, the controversialist and divine, Francis Blackburne, from writing a life of Martin Luther), Baretti sent Hollis a letter at the end of 1761. The extract that Blackburne printed complains of Hollis' unwillingness to be praised in Baretti's *Lettere Familiari*. It continues with a rather Johnsonian theory of biography, and an early conjunction of Johnson with Porten (see below — I think Blackburne misread Baretti's hand):

To bring about my purpose, I must not only ridicule absurdity, and blame vice, but I must exalt worthiness and set off virtue; yet you must know that austere reasoning and dry maxims do not glibly go down with the plurality of readers;

³ Quoted by permission of the Harvard College Library. There are accounts of this Diary in James L. Clifford, "Some Problems of Johnson's Obscure Middle Years," in *Johnson, Boswell, and Their Circle: Essays Presented to Lawrence Fitzroy Powell in Honour of his Eighty-Fourth Birthday* (Oxford, 1965), pp. 101-106; and Caroline Robbins, "The Strenuous Whig, Thomas Hollis of Lincoln's Inn," *William and Mary Quarterly*, VII (1950), 406-453.

and you know that domestic anecdotes strike deeper in the mind than more virulent invectives, or the most pathetic exhortations: I have therefore a right to exalt Hollis, and celebrate Johnson, as I have to ridicule a fool, and to blame a knave, and name their names; and your untimely modesty must give way to the least attempt towards bettering the commonwealth. Ask Mr. Porter and Mr. Johnson whether my argument is conclusive; and if they deny my consequence, then will I blot some of my best periods.⁴

Blackburne found Hollis' acquaintance with Baretti a great embarrassment; he concludes this passage with evident relief: "This letter of Baretti is dated from Milan, and undoubtedly relates to Mr. Hollis's benefactions to the writer; but where and of what kind we know not, as there are no other remains of Mr. Hollis's correspondence with Baretti."

On 26 February 1763 we see Hollis preparing the parcel for which Baretti's letter expressed thanks: "Within the whole day entering and preparing certain parcells of Pamphlets, which I am sending abroad as presents to Consul Holford of Genoa, Mr Baretti of Milan, Mr Termy of Leghorn & Mr How at Pisa." On 30 June 1765 Hollis sent Baretti a letter and "a Bank note of £20, as a little mark of my regard to him." Baretti, in turn, sent Hollis his *Lettere Familiari* (June 1765) and six copies of *La Frusta Letteraria*, which Hollis dispersed, "bound, to the following persons": Mr. Johnson, Mr. Cipriani, The British Museum, Dr. Williams' Library, Radcliffe Library, Oxford, and Christ College, Cambridge (23 March 1766).

Baretti spent the evening of 10 October 1766, one of his first after his return to London, with Hollis, and in March 1767 talked with him of his edition of Machiavelli. On 7 May of that year Hollis proposed Baretti and two other Italian artists as honorary Fellows of the Society of Antiquaries, to which all three were elected on 18 June. Hollis was much concerned with Baretti's arrest and trial for manslaughter. He visited Baretti at Newgate and gave him £20. "He treated me rather coolly, yet thanked me for the present, and expressed a desire, that I should attend his trial" (13 October 1769 — Hollis did not attend).

The last entry concerning Baretti in the Hollis Diary shows Baretti terminating yet another friendship in animosity:

⁴ Francis Blackburne, *Memoirs of Thomas Hollis, Esq.*, 2 Vols. (London, 1780), I, 124.

Then Mr Cipriani, by desire, relating to a letter received from Mr Martinelli yesterday under cover from Mr Baretti, representing illness & poverty & requesting help. Agreed, both of us, that that letter was indiscretely written, & ought not to be regarded. Desired Mr Cipriani to return the letter to Mr Baretti. Busied about odd matters.

(13 February 1770)

The 1763 letter is clear and self-explanatory, except, perhaps, for some of the proper names and one or two of the allusions. Baretti's disappointment at the hands of Count Firmian is related in his biographies, and in a letter which he sent to Samuel Johnson in July 1762, also in the *Commonplace Book*.⁵ It is also possible, from these same sources, to identify the "cause that it is needless to tell" as the disappointment of his love for Rosina Fuentes, the young daughter of one of his old friends.⁶ Giovanni Marsili, a Paduan botanist and physician, apparently spent some of his time in London with Baretti at the botanical gardens, and suffered a seizure which Johnson remembered twenty-two years later (*Life*, I, 322). Marsili also wrote a dreadful sonnet lavishing praise on Baretti's *Piacevolie poesie* (1750).⁷ "The prophet Heathcote" was George Heathcote, a copy of whose pamphlet, *A Letter To the Right Honourable The Lord Mayor, The Worshipful Aldermen, and Common-Council; The Merchants, Citizens, and Inhabitants, of the City of London. From an Old Servant* (London, 1762) is in the British Museum. Martinico-Sugar and Goree-Gum are commodities named after their places of origin. Mr. Mortimer's lists must have been Thomas Mortimer's *The Universal Director* (London, 1763).

His use of the technical terms *trillo* and *messa-di-voce*, along with "the strife about the Opera-House between singing Mingotti and pimping Vanneschi," remind us of Baretti's continuing involvement with the Opera, and his part in the feud between Vanneschi and Giardini (1752-53, Jonard, p. 111). It is not possible to determine which of Mason's and Churchill's works Hollis had sent, but Mason's *Elegies* were published in 1763, and there was a second edition of his *Caractacus* in 1762. Churchill's satire on Bute and the Scots, the *Prophecy of*

⁵ See Norbert Jonard, *Giuseppe Baretti (1719-1789): L'homme et L'oeuvre* (Clermont-Ferrand, [1963]), pp. 322-328 — hereafter cited as Jonard.

⁶ See also Luigi Piccioni, "Amori e Ambizioni de Giuseppe Baretti," *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana*, LXXII (1918), 107-132.

⁷ Jonard, pp. 174, 72; Giuseppe Baretti, *La Frusta Letteraria*, ed. Luigi Piccioni (Bari, 1932), I, 265.

Fame, probably went along, too. Hollis had sent Count Algarotti a copy of *Caractacus*, and is mentioned frequently in the capacity in which he appears here in the correspondence between Algarotti and William Taylor How.⁸

The Cocoa-tree was a Political Club on St. James's Street and the addressee of a number of political letters. I have not identified the ones Baretti was sent, but there is a like publication in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, XXXIV (1764), 162-164, entitled "*A Letter from Albemarle-street to the Cocoa-Tree.*" The opening of that letter will give some idea of the sort of thing Baretti was sending thanks for:

GENTLEMEN,

SOME have made the Cocoa Tree a cover for publishing the detestable doctrines of arbitrary power, and insolent aspersions on some of that illustrious family under which we so happily enjoy our liberty. I shall make no such use of the name, nor confound things as opposite as merit and demerit.

The concluding catalogue of friends to whom Baretti sent his compliments, through Hollis, is an impressive list of mutual acquaintances for two such independent creatures as these to share: Johnson and Reynolds need no elaboration, while those who might can be traced through *DNB*, Baretti's *Epistolario*, and some out-of-the-way sources: William Fitzherbert, M. P. (1712-1772) of Tissington, in Derbyshire, came to Baretti's assistance during his trial. Baretti seems to have spent some months at his house as a tutor for his son.⁹ Thomas Brand was Hollis' longtime friend. He inherited his estate, and changed his name to Thomas Brand Hollis. Sir Stanier Porten (d. 1789), mentioned above in connection with Hollis' Diary and *Memoirs*, was British resident at the court of Naples, and Gibbons' grandfather. Hollis mentions him frequently in the Diary, and followed his diplomatic career with interest and encouragement. Giovanni Battista Cipriani (1727-1785), an Italian painter and engraver whose work graces Hollis' *Memoirs*, came to London with Wilton in 1755. Joseph Wilton (1722-1803), a sculptor and member of the Royal Academy, attended Baretti's funeral (*The European Magazine*, XVI, 93).

For at least one of his dispersals, then, Thomas Hollis received

⁸ Paget Toynbee and Leonard Whibley, eds., *The Correspondence of Thomas Gray* (Oxford, 1935), III, 1235.

⁹ Lacy Collison-Morley, *Giuseppe Baretti: With an Account of his Literary Friendships and Feuds in Italy and in England in the Days of Dr. Johnson* (London, 1909), p. 208.

extensive, and still interesting, acknowledgement, the preceding letter from Giuseppe Baretti. This document, characteristic of the other letters of its author, and undoubtedly most welcome to its recipient at the time of its arrival, is useful testimony to the nature of the relationship between these two equally odd individuals.

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